

A REVIEW OF THE BACKGROUND OF DISSENT PRIOR TO THE REFORMATION

As we have previously discussed in class by the late 11th century all of Europe was Christianized. The leaders of the various areas had converted to Christianity and with almost no exception they forced their "people" to also convert (some Jews remained, though they were at best tolerated, and at worst murdered). Western and Central Europe chose to follow the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore the Pope, while Eastern followers chose the various Eastern Orthodox Branches. Remember, in the Western Catholic Church the office of Pope had an enormous amount of power. For some the word of the Pope was and remains the word of God and that word is deemed infallible.

Additionally, as we have also reviewed, in the 11th Century the Church established a number of new rules. The Church was suffering as a result of corruption, offices were regularly sold (simony) and non-church people (generally Kings) were often performing the ceremony known as lay investiture, installing a new bishop. As a result, the church instituted various reforms including: one; priests must be celibate (no sexual relations with anyone) and unmarried, secondly; the Pope created the position known as Cardinal. Cardinals would head certain geographic areas called archdioceses and also elect the new Pope when the current Pope died. Cardinals became known as the "Princes of the Church." The Pope selected the Cardinals himself.

In another major event in the 11th Century, Pope Urban II initiated a crusade to regain Jerusalem from the Muslims. In order to ensure that there were sufficient numbers of people for the crusades, the Roman Catholic Church created an exemption from purgatory for people who fought. **Purgatory** was (is) believed to be a place where after there mortal death, Christians were forced to go for a period of time to essentially pay-off for the sins they committed on Earth.

During the Middle Ages the average person had a very limited lifespan. Death occurred at a much younger age, sanitary conditions were unknown, meals largely consisted of hot black porridge and there was no expectation that life would ever change. As a result the hope for a better life in the afterworld was often the only thing people could look forward to. The church during the Middle Ages became more and more fundamental to people's lives. It was during the later part of this period (sometimes called the "Age of Faith") that the great cathedrals were built in Europe in honor of the Church and God, such as the Cathedral at Chartres in France. Moreover, money poured into the Church as a result of the requirement that all people tithe (give ten percent of their yearly income to the church). As a result the Church gained more and more power, money and land. In addition, **the church was not taxed by the government or answerable to the King.** Eventually the Church had large landholdings throughout Europe (as much as 50% in the Principalities of Germany and 20-30% in France and England). The cardinals in these regions were appointed by the Pope and held enormous power. As a result the church often competed with the royalty for authority. An early example of this problem we previously studied involved Henry II the Prince in the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) who attempted to install a cardinal in his kingdom. As we learned, Henry II tried to take some control away from the church.

With the use of excommunication and an interdict, Henry II was forced to travel close to a 1000 miles to apologize to Pope Gregory VII and waited 3 days in the snow before the Pope allowed him in. The Pope had effectively used his power and reasserted his control.

In the 13th century a large group of people in the southern part of France began to practice a new form of conservative Catholicism, which included a requirement that all people be celibate. These people called the Albigensians (or Cathars) gained many followers, because they were perceived as a threat to the Church's teachings they were deemed as heretics and slaughtered. It was in this period of time that the Church created a new institution called the **Inquisition**. The Inquisition was not aimed at non-Christians, but rather people whom the church had determined were heretics. The **Inquisition** was essentially a hearing to determine whether someone was properly following the rules of the Catholic Church. To try to ensure fairness the hearings included many aspects of what we today call due process; including the right to an attorney, limitations on torture to gain a confession (torturers were not allowed to draw blood, torture was to be limited to 15 minute periods, and if one confessed after torture, to ensure that the cause of the confession was not the torture itself, the person was given 24 hours time before being requested to reconfess) and a church official to oversee the process to assure the process followed the rules.

However, even with these protections the Inquisition was often unfair and based on statements by witnesses who's testimony was self-serving (for their own benefit). Often the Inquisition process was used against Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity (mostly in Spain which as we have learned was largely Muslim in the 11th Century but as a result of the reconquista, became more and more Christian). The Office of Inquisitor lasted for several centuries and was not limited to those who converted. One of the most famous people to suffer the rulings of the Inquisition was Galileo Galilei. Galileo's crime was asserting that the earth revolved around the sun (heliocentric) instead of the opposite. Galileo wasn't burned at the stake but left to live life in absentia.

In the early 14th century, as the 100 year war progressed (between England and France, and the French Papacy during the Great Schism), many in England resented fighting a French King and at the same time have to send their tithings to the Church in France (Avignon). In the late 14th Century, an English priest named **John from Wycliff** came to the forefront. Wycliff was a teacher at Oxford University (remember universities in Europe were still a relatively new phenomenon). Wycliff began to criticize the Church. Wycliff believed that many of the churches rituals were incorrect and extravagant. Wycliff argued that the

1. **Eucharist** (offering or communion) (taking of bread and wine) was not the actual blood and body of Jesus Christ but merely symbolic; and,
2. The Pope was not the head of the Church, that clergy (church officers) should not hold possessions; and,
3. The Pope should not have final authority over the Bible and that the Bible should be translatable into languages other than Greek or Latin.

To empower the average Englishman, Wycliff **translated the New Testament** into English. Wycliff's ideas were viewed by the Church authorities as heresy, which usually meant being roasted on a pole. But Wycliff was supported by the English royalty who despised tithing all that wealth to a Pope in France (remember, Wycliff lived during the 100 year War when the Papacy was largely centered in Avignon, France). The nobility probably also realized that if the Church had less influence, their own influence would increase (zero-sum game).

Wycliff became a hero to many average people in England. The Black Plague devastated Europe (remember 1/3rd of the population died), ironically to some extent it benefited the poor. Areas had become depopulated and as laborers became scarce, their power increased. With so many people gone, there were too few people to farm and do other forms of labor. The poor began to demand better treatment. Unfortunately the power of the people may have been a little too much for the English Royalty, and after a number of riots in the late 14th Century, they decided that the poor were getting too many new ideas. Now, Wycliff was perceived as a threat and thereafter both the Peasants and Wycliff were suppressed.

However, Wycliff's ideas were not as quickly forgotten, people from various areas outside of England were attending University at Oxford, one group was from an area in central Europe called Bohemia (part of the current Czech Republic, pronounced Check) returned to their homeland. Eventually Wycliff's ideas found there way to **Charles University** in Prague and to a priest named **Jan of Hus** (people in the medieval days did not have last names but first names and their last names referred to the place they were from). Hus, like Wycliff, argued that priests could interpret the Bible themselves, that the Eucharist was merely symbolic and that the Pope was not the voice of God. Because of his views the Church excommunicated him, however, like Wycliff, Hus was initially protected by Royalty, specifically Sigismund of Bohemia. He also developed a strong following amongst his countrymen/women.

While local leaders did not have the chance to take Mr. Balazs's social studies class they nonetheless knew that based on the zero-sum game, if the church lost power then they would gain power. But it wasn't simply just the Church and the Nobles who were involved, there were peasants too, and like with Wycliff, the Nobles became a little unglued when they realized that the peasants might use Hus' ideas to limit their power. In the end Hus lost. He was promised safe travel to Italy to argue his case before the Church, but once there in a secret agreement between the Church and Sigismund, Hus was taken away and like Joan of Arc, burned to death in 1415, which was coincidentally the same year that the "Great Schism" ended, and a single Pope in Rome once again ruled the Roman Catholic Church.

Name _____

Due _____

Questions

1. What is the Eucharist and how were John Wycliff's ideas different from the Church's?
2. Why do you think the Church did not want the Bible to be translated into languages other than Greek or Latin?
3. How did Hus get his ideas from Wycliff (remember they never met and lived several years apart)?
4. Why did Average people like Hus and Wycliff?
5. Why did the Royals like Wycliff?
6. Why did the Royals like Hus?
7. What happened to Wycliff? What happened to Hus?

